DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 326 661 CE 056 421

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TITLE The End of the Wall--Adult Education on Trial.
PUB DATE Nov 90
NOTE 24p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Association for Adult and Continuing Education (Salt Lake City, UT, November 1990).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Viewpoints (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Adult Education; Change Agents; *Communism; Developed Nations; *Educational Needs; Educational Objectives; Educational Responsibility; Foreign Countries; Relevance (Education); *Role of Education; Social Change; *Socialism
IDENTIFIERS *East Germany; USSR

ABSTRACT

Adult educators need to realize that the decline of socialism in Europe is a matter of spiritual developments and changes of mentalities, attitudes, and patterns of thinking and judging. The occurrence of a general orientation crisis indicates a need for learning as people look for new rules and structures. As a result of the closed system, the people have a mental dependence on orders, regulations, plans, and perspectives from above. The practical experience of free initiatives and fair play in their implementation would help them overcome this dependence. Also on trial and doubted by Eastern Europeans are the moral standards and values of the western world, which prizes business efficiency and money making. Adult educators are being asked for convincing patterns of orientation and interpretation and for reliable examples of behavior. Adult education must also help the people better understand the rules of an open market, the chances of private agriculture, and the necessity of a new economic thinking and more efficient work. Adult education can meet the challenge by providing students with marketable skills and meeting the basic needs of the people. (YLB)

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Gunther Dohmen

The end of the wall - Adult education on trial

What does the end of the wall between the free world and the dissolving socalled socialistic systems in East Europe and the Soviet Union mean for adult education ?

Fundamental spiritual battles

At a first look we may just see a glorious overall victory of the western ideas of freedom, western parliamentary democracy and the free market over the authoritarian socialist systems in East Europe.
The decline of the red empire seems to give way to personal freedom, democratic self-administration and economic prosperity in East Europe and the USSR.

But if you see the real very difficult situation in the countries formerly dominated by communist parties you may understand that it is not just a matter of political, economic or military changes but mainly now of spiritual developments, changes of mentalities, of attitudes, of patterns of thinking and judging. And this battle is still going on and it will still last for a long time.

The stone walls are fallen - but the walls in the heads, in the thinking, in the mentalities etc. do still exist.
We have a saying in Germany: 50% of politics is psychology. And this seems to be especially true in periods of fundamental changes.

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Much will depend on the mental developments of the people, on the new ideas which will change the old beliefs and guidelines in the heads and hearts of the people. What had been massively and continously indoctrinated during 40 years - or more than 70 years in the USSR - cannot be wiped out in a few months.

Here adult education really is on trial !

And the rigorous Kremlin regime had not only suppressed freedom and self-determination in the Soviet Union, in Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia and the Balkan States - it had also kept down national, ethnic and religious rivalries which are now arising again and which can bring up a new period of uncertainty and chaos and even of regional and religious battles and wars in these areas.

The new eastern nationalism has also a dangerous backward tendency and it will be a big challenge to open it to the ideas of freedom and multicultural tolerance and peaceful understanding.

And what shall happen if the economic experiments with a free market system in Eastern Europe will fail ? How will the people react to the economic disappointments which still accompanie the introduction of the mechanism of a free market in their countries

There are some warning indications that the economic reforms in East Europe and in the USSR might first of all rather lead to a desaster than to a florishing free economic and trade system.

And this can be a good breeding ground for roll back developments first in the minds of people and then in politics. As we cannot be interested in the reestablishment of new authoritarian ideolo-

gical and military regimes in Eastern Europe and the USSR we have to do everything we can to bring in an effective democratic adult education into this mental battle.
Nobody knows today how long President Gorbatschow and his Perestroika will still survive the increasing economic misery and the growing chaos in the staggering Soviet empire.

Perestroika and western ideas are already partly loosing some of its sympathies and supporters and this I think can lead us into a crucial period in world history.
We all are on trial in this period - not only as free citizens who want to defend freedom, democracy and peace in the world but also and very special as adult educators who are supposed to influence the views, the opinions and the attitudes of people.

Isn't it the special task of adult education to change views and patterns of understanding ? If education at all shall change attitudes and behavior - then it chiefly can be initiated by influencing and changing the awareness, the patterns and values of apprehension and judging in and by learning processes.

Following generations might once critically ask how we have met these historical challenges, how we have used the chances and fought the dangers of this new situation.

I think it is a challenge to all adult educators - on both sides of the broken wall.

General orientation crisis in Eastern Europe

There are millions of people in Eastern Europe and in the USSR who feel that the ground under their feet is broken.
Communist state socialism in its rigorous stalinistic appearance has proved a complete failure and it certainly is not very popular among the people who have suffered from it. But this does not mean that these people now believe in western "capitalism".

They are looking for new landmarks, for new rules and structures which might help to bring about a more democratic and a more efficient handling of their common affairs. But there are still other patterns of thinking and judging in their heads and hearts and they have other moral standards which are directed towards more social justice and equity than they can see in our Western countries. But most of them seem to be just helpless now and they are first of all longing for a better knowledge and orientation.

So this orientation crisis first of all means learning, learning and learning again - and this is a tremendous challenge to Adult Education.
And it means for us that our values, our standards, our models, our landmarks are on trial. They have to prove their integrity, their efficiency, their persuasive power now - against the mental tracks and traces of half a centuries authoritarian and ideological education.

Can you imagine what it means if you have lived during all your lifetime in a closed system where you have always got orders, guidelines, control, appreciation and punishment from an authority somewhere above you ?

I think the general attitude of these eastern people can be characterized as a sort of "passive readiness" now - which means lack of personal initiative and creative activity but readiness to follow better plans and leaders.

And perhaps the worst result of this closed system is a lasting status of mental dependance on orders, regulations, plans, perspectives which shall come from somewhere above.

Let me give you an example of this deep rooted mental state of dependance :

I met a leading representative of adult education from a socalled socialist country . It was some years before the end of the wall. In a private talk he had given to me a clear critical analysis of the inhumane practices of indoctrination in his country.

I asked him to write this down and give it to me and I offered to him that I could publish it in my country.

He said: "Thank you very much. But at the moment I cannot take this risk. My son is still in the army and he wants to get a place to study at the university afterwards. Perhaps if he will have got this study place and if our political situation has improved a little I can give a moderate version of my analysis for publication in the West."

When his son was at the university I asked him again. But this time he said: "Sorry, I will have a chance to become a member of an expert group of my country which will go to Paris next summer. Your publication would certainly bring me out of the delegation."

To cut a long story short: I asked him ever and ever again and he always had another reason why he couldn't take the risk of having his critical analysis published. He was interwoven in such a narrow network of privileges and reprisal that he never dared to attack the system he and his family depended on.
And when the system finally changed he was so much used to this status of dependance that he was still hesitating to take a personal initiative and preferred to wait how things might finally turn out and what the changes would bring to him.
This might be an example for the alienated minds and broken characters we are confronted with in adult education.

We know from learning psychology how difficult it is to change deep rooted patterns of thinking and behavior. This knowledge can help us to understand the shock some eastern people feel if they are confronted with an unused freedom and if they are suddenly expected to take open decisions and responsibilities on their own without a more or less official backing and security. It is not easy for those people to fall into a free market world which is governed by the rules of free enterprise, personal initiative, clever money making and fighting one's way through against competitors.
I think what they chiefly need to overcome their attitude of passive dependance is the practical experience of free

initiatives as well as fair play in their implementation, of creating chances and using them with social responsibibity.

Moral standards

And as I said already there are still some doubts in the back of their heads about the moral value of this western world which in their view is a world with predominantly economic values like business efficiency, money making, elbow competition in order to get a good position in consumers glamour paradise.

I think there is really a fundamental battle of thinking going on in Eastern Europe. People are fascinated by western economic prosperity and personal freedom but at the same time they still have other categories, other patterns of thinking, understanding and judging which often cause fears uncertainty and aggression.

Isn't this a typical challenge for adult education ?
50% of the adult people in Eastern Germany said in a recent opinion poll that they need and want the help of adult education. But that also means that the messages transmitted by adult education are on trial there.

Taxi capitalism

Western adult educators can make shocking experiences during this period of approximation and mutual learning in East Europe - especially if they are faced with some embarrassing strange ways how our western patterns of thinking and behaving are sometimes

reflected in other minds and how we can be copied there .

Let me give you an example - a recent personal experience in East Germany:

I arrived at a large railway station in Eastern Germany and I wanted to get a taxi. There was a taxi sign outside of the station and a long line of people waited there for a taxi. But there was no taxi.

About 200 meters along the street there were a dozen of taxis. their drivers standing together and talking. I wondered why people did not go over to these taxis. They all patiently waited in their queue. But I as a typical "Wessi" did not hesitate to go to the taxis and asked the taxi drivers who could bring me to a place about 3 miles away. Their answer was just: "Nobody".

Astonished and slightly aggressive I asked again: "And what are you doing here ?" The answer was: "As you see: we talk to each other." And one of them explained to me: "Don't you see the line over there at the taxi stand ? You have to line up there and wait till it will be our turn to come over. We have no privileges for pushing westerners here !"

When I still swallowed a young man came from behind and asked me: "You want a taxi ? " I answered : "Yes, I want to go to the X Street" He said: "O.K. I have a taxi. It is just around the corner. If you give me 40.-DM I'll bring you there."

I said: "No. 40.-DM is too much. It is just a few blocks driving from here. The fare cannot be more than 6.-DM"

He laughed: " Well, it is up to you. You have the choice: 40.-DM in advance or line up there and wait for a few hours till you

perhaps get a cheaper taxi."

I had some luggage with me and I was already a little late, so I agreed gritting my teeth. The man of course had no taxi - but a very old and dirty private car. Sitting in this rattling car I told him: "Do you know that you are practising usury ? At home I would pay not more than 6.-DM for this short distance and I would get a comfortable Mercedes taxi for it." The driver answered: "What do you mean ? We are just learning to practice the rules of a free market. We have a shortage situation with taxis and we try to get as much money as possible out of it. Isn't this just what you call capitalistic exploitation of the market situation and clever profit making by taking advantage of other peoples weakness ?"

This is what they have learned about capitalism and about the western credo in the "free market".

This example may also illustrate what I mean when I speak of an orientation crisis. We must try to understand the problems many people in the East do have now with our patterns and issues.

The ground beneath their feet is broken and this uncertainty makes them stagger between extreme reactions: to line up in resignation or to overdo by turning over to a 150% adaptation to what they think is the western way of life.

And we can study this super-capitalism almost everywhere in the prospering black markets in East and South East Europe.

Western values on trial

You must know that many unscrupulous profit makers from the West are overflowing the eastern alternative street markets since the end of the wall. The way how they try to sell rubbish for excessive prizes to unexperienced people gives an example which can only make us feel ashamed - and which can make our issues and also our educational efforts untrustworthy.
Our standards, our values, our ways of treating one another, the examples we give are on trial there.

Many people in East Europe are deeply longing for a thorough political, personal and vocational re-orientation and western adult educators are asked for information, explanation, also for money and equipment. But first of all we are asked for convincing patterns of orientation and interpretation and for reliable examples of behavior.
And we are faced with inconvenient fundamental questions like:
What are you living for ? Is it just for money making ?
How do you use your freedom for the common weal ?

And our eastern adult education colleagues can ask us:
How can we lead people to social responsibility and behavior - in freedom, without forcing them ? How can you do it in an economic system which seems to be mainly based on human egoism ?

You see : Our western philosophy as well as our adult education standards are on trial in a situation where the walls have fallen between two very different worlds and educational traditions.

There are critical questions which we have to ask ourselves: Can the free market really be our main message ? What about the counterbalance of social responsibility and security ?

Let me give you another example for the challenging situation we meet there in Eastern Europe:
The so-called socialist agricultural system has not only changed the structure of properties and ownerships - it has also changed the patterns of thinking and behavior of the farmers.
Making private profit on private ground is still supposed to be morally suspicious. The peasants became workers in industrialized agricultural cooperatives which were completely governed by the state and the party. The land, the barns, the machinery, the harvest - all was owned by the cooperative. The agricultural workers got their fixed salaries, had their fixed working hours and free times and vacations. State and party representatives organized their daily work and guaranteed the selling of their products for fixed prices.
And now ? A majority of the people in this cooperative agricultural system still prefers this safer way of living to the new stress of caring for everything yourself, bearing the risk of bad harvests, decline of prices etc. The state guaranteed regular work, regular salary and social security. And this system of "socialist achievements" still appears to many of them more humane than the destroying competition in the western market system.

When the free agricultural market got introduced for instance in East Germany the agricultural cooperatives could not sell their goods any more because their products were more expensive than the same products coming from West Germany and from the world market. And then the agricultural people formed big protest demonstrations, poured the milk which they could not sell anymore into the streets, blamed western "ellbow-capitalism" for their misery, for the loss of their working places and some began to praise again the old socialist regime.

In order to avoid social riots and a sort of counter-revolution in the thinking in rural areas the new democratic government began to subsidize the cooperatives again, bought their products for a price higher than the price on the world market...

And then adult education was asked to help the people better understand the rules of an open market, the chances of private farmership and the necessity of a new economic thinking and a more efficient work. - A difficult job because you have to argue against the whole lifelong education of the people and against their actual social fears.

Re-orientation ?

What can we do in such a situation ?

I just try to give you one example for an adult education approach in this case . It is just an old educational approach:

Some common daily experiences are to be picked up and reflected and discussed. For instance that the agricultural cooperative often had sold their eggs for a good guaranteed price to a cooperative retail store and that immediately afterwards they had

bought some of their own eggs back again for the much cheaper state guaranteed selling prize.

So they could sell and buy the same eggs several times and they could make a good profit from the difference between the guaranteed prices they got as producers and the cheaper subsidized prizes for consumers.

From this example you can promote an awareness and an understanding why this centralized system of subsidies against the market must finally lead into a financial desaster and into the state's bankruptcy. And discussing this experience you may also promote a critical moral awareness that the agricultural cooperative with its eggs was in an unjustifiable way profiting from the state's subsidies which should keep basic food cheap for the people and that all this together must have led to a desastrous end with wrotten machinery, decaying buildings and a terrible pollution of the exploited soil. - And all these results can be seen, they cannot be denied.

But neverteless: it is still difficult to overcome the distrustful argument that under the old regime their cooperative had been altogether working whereas their bankruptcy and their unemployment had only come with the new regime and its market ideology.

And you can hear arguments like :

" We cannot eat freedom. First of all we need food and jobs and a reliable social security network. But we are loosing all this now with the new regime."

And additional difficulties can come from some of our adult education colleagues in the formerly communist countries who

secretely share the opinions and the fears of the people who defend the socalled socialist achievements against the new " inhumanity and stress of a merciless competative market".

Socialist achievements for women ?

Women did profit from a real "socialist achievement" when they tried to combine family and job-work.

Whereas in the western part of Germany 48 % of the women are working in a job, in East Germany it is more than 90%. But nevertheless the birth rate in East Germany is 50% higher than in West Germany.

One of the reasons for this confusing difference is the fact that in East Germany it is not so difficult to combine family obligations with job working because there are enough places for children in kindergardens and day-nurseries. Women could bring their children there in the morning on their way to work and they could pick them up again in the late afternoon on their way back home. And this service was practically almost free of charge.

In West Germany there are only very few places at all for children younger than 4 years. And the kindergardens do not adapt their opening times to the working hours of the mothers etc.

As the German unification is mainly a process of incorporation of East Germany into the existing structures of West Germany we have the actual danger now that the advantages working women had in East Germany get lost because everything is modelled now after the western examples - even if they may be worse than some eas-

tern traditions.

This is a reason why German women in East and West begin to fight now for the takeover of eastern advantages also to western Germany in order to generally improve the situations of women in Germany.

But whatever problems we may have with adult education in East Germany - I am sure we'll finally master them. It may need 5 - 10 years of hard work and big financial sacrifices, but we are optimistic about the future.

New thinking - old behavior

A much bigger challenge seems to be the situation in the USSR. There we have the exciting situation that there is a big change in thinking but almost no change in practical behavior and no progress at all in the daily living conditions. Quite the contrary: The political and chiefly the economic situation is driving more and more into a real chaos.

I remember a big adult education conference in the USSR. The main topic was the promotion of "Perestroika", of the new democratic thinking, in and by adult education in the Soviet Union. I attended this conference as an international consultant and I finally chaired a committee which had to define the "new thinking" and the main principles of its implementation in and by adult education.

Well, the conference came out with a good paper and a clear confession to a new free democratic spirit in adult education.

A few months later I met one of the participants again and I asked him, what came out in the meantime of our progressive democratic resolution at the conference. He answered:

" Oh, it certainly was a sort of breakthrough in the direction towards a better understanding of the new thinking. But it is so difficult to find adequate forms to practically exercise and materialize this new thinking in adult education."

And then he said: "You see, it is like the general situation in our country. What is possible now in the SU is free thinking and speaking. We can openly criticize the old system - but in our daily practice very little is changing: In adult education we have still the same organisational structures, the same methods of teaching, the same patterns of behavior of teachers and learners and the same bureaucracy - in spite of all the wonderful philosophical reflections and theoretical dreams about a better world and an ideal system of a free humanistic and truly democratic adult education.

The change still chiefly exists in theory, in our thoughts and in wonderful enthusiastic words - but not in reality.

And to be quite open: We do not know how we could effectively practisize the " new thinking."

And you can often here from adult educators in the USSR the question:

"Could'nt we now have the opportunity to see how you practice and promote freedom and democracy in your daily work in adult education ? "

This then led to the planning of an East-West-Exchange program

for adult educators. But it proved to be very difficult to finance and to organize this program, to come along with the different languages etc. We inquired also the possibility to establish a new foundation for the support of exchange and reform programs implementing free democratic structures, methods and behaviors in the formerly communist adult education systems. But this plan also could not be sufficiently materialized so far.
In this context we are now preparing the establishment of a special branch office of the European Bureau of Adult Education for the cooperation with adult education institutions in East Europe and in the USSR.

Students between two worlds

Some people say, we should concentrate our adult education efforts in the formerly communist countries more on young people. They are supposed to be more open and flexibel than the older generations who had been too long under the manifold pressure of adaptation. And within this young generation some hopes rest especially on the students as the new elite of multiplicators.

In this context let me mention some sobering experiences with students in East Germany.
In the early summer this year I was as a guest professor for adult education at a formerly so called marxist university. In discussions with the students there I often heared the following arguments:
" Yes we admit: It is good that we are free now to speak openly about everything - without danger to get eliminated from the

university as enemies of socialist progress if we criticize the regime.

But now: what are the results of the end of this regime for us ? When we once had got the admission to the university we got a financial support from the old regime which allowed us to study independant of our parents. We had guaranteed places in students dormitories and we could be sure to get adequate jobs immediately after our final examination.

And now ? Our scholarships are going down and the prices in the students "mensa" and the dormitories and everywhere else go up. And our examination will not help us any more to get a job. Most of us will probably stay unemployed.

How can you expect us to be enthusiastic about the new freedom which turns out to be a freedom for unemployment and social misery ?"

By the way: You can hear similar arguments from the artists, writers etc. All the possible "multiplicators" had been involved in a tricky system of support, advancement, patronage and rewards which kept them in a status of loyalty to the regime - which makes the situation of adult education not easier.

Adult education as a new challenge

But back to the students: One approach to get them out of their resistance and defeatism seems to be the initiative to establish new departments of adult education in the universities with new diplomas and careers in a field which has a tremendous lack of

experts - and which opens new chances to get a job after the examination.

If 50% of the adult people say that they need and want adult education courses now in order to bring up their professional qualifications to the new challenges of the labor market and in order to get the necessary new general and political orientation it will be necessary to establish adequate adult education institutions and to care for adequate possibilities to bring up qualified professional adult educators.

Some students take this as a big challenge and a new chance for them. But they will still have to learn a lot:

Under the communist regimes the state and the party were the main supporters of adult education. Now adult education shall be freed from this dominating dependance and influence. They are now expected to organize adult education around the learning interests of the people. And the interested learners shall support the institutions with their fees.

Most people are not able to clearly articulate their learning needs and the adult educators are not used to take new initiatives. They are not used to something like a need analysis and a flexible program planning to answer actual needs. The needs had been defined by the party. The party leaders and the government always knew what the learning needs of the people had to be. So adult educators got used to an attitude of waiting for being asked to do something. This "passive readiness" is still the familiar attitude of many of them.

" How shall we know what sort of new competences the new society will need ? We only know the system which is breaking down now. And how could we know by which methods and exercises the new qualifications can be effectively acquired in this completely new situation in our country ?

If our old and new authorities are unable to answer these questions and to organize an adequate organizational framework for the new adult education - then the experts from the West must help us: You must have relevant experiences with the new challenges, the new competences and the new methods of learning and teaching. So please : Do tell us what we shall do !"
I think this is a dangerous trap.

More general competences

The situation is rather complicated.
Even if we would have the answers to their questions we should not play the role of new authorities and commanders .
But we must admit that western adult educators often do not have the required experience and sensitivity because the basic conditions and the mental situations of the potential learners in those formerly communist areas are completely different from our familiar situations at home.
There are some western adult education agencies who just try to bring in new knowledge about modern technology. But I doubt that this meets the central needs of the people. At least it is not enough.

People used to a so-called "command economy" do need more than just a special job related updating of their professional knowledge and skills.
There are other personal and social competences needed like personal initiative, self confidence, individual drive, openmindedness, social responsibility, flexibility, frankness, courage etc.

The special vocational skills are rastly changing - and that is another reason why people need some broader fundamentals which enable them to develop the different adaptive variations on their own.

We have to realize that a narrow job related skill training alone does not help in the general situation which I tried to describe to you.
What we need is a whole change of thinking and behavior. We need new patterns of understanding and judging, new mentalities and new attitudes.
But how to promote these basic mental and behavioral changes ?
We cannot just theoretically teach it.
We need convincing examples. We must make it possible for our colleagues in East Europe to experience shining practical models which are convincingly and effectively working in a difficult transition period.
It seems to be a Sisyphean work: Even if we would have these infectious examples - there are still the language barriers, the financial bottlenecks, the organisational problems with bureaucracies and some mental barriers.

False expectations

And I think there are also some false hopes which we must disappoint:

We cannot bring a new truth which we just distribute through adult education. We cannot and will not bring a new fixed general plan for adult education.

We must disappoint the expectation that somebody should in an authoritarian way give new central curricula for every adult educator.

We cause necessary disappointments if we say: No, we have no common compulsory ideology which shall be spread out in an authoritarian way. We are open to different opinions and approaches, to free discussion and to more open methods in adult education.

We must try to understand that this is overstraining many people because they are not used to live in an open complex world with no given perspectives, aims, guidelines, plans, regulations.

In private talks I several times was asked by colleagues in East Europe: "Are we expected to go to church again now ?"
"Would you recommend us to become members of this new party or that western trade union in order to find a new spiritual home and to have a good effective "rope-party" in the new state ?"

What I wanted to convey to you by these remarks is a feeling , a critical awareness of the very difficult but necessary task for adult education after the end of the wall.

We must and I hope we will avoid an approach which just substitutes one ideology by another one. It is no adequate answer to the actual challenge if we now substitute the marxist ideology by an ideology of capitalism, or if we preach now that paradise on earth will come from the free market instead of from a centrally planned economy etc.

This sort of substitutional policy might be convenient to former members of the "nomenclatura" (the leading staff members of the communist regimes) because it would allow them to keep up their old mentality, their well known patterns of thinking and behaving.

Some of them think they could just have to change the contents - not the structures of their thinking and behaving.

I remember one of these communist-block-heads saying in a recent public discussion: "Now we have to unite our forces again in order to establish a new really democratic society and this means that we must "liquidate" the enemies of this new future."

You see: The problem is sometimes not the problem itself but the way how people see it and how they treat it.

So once again: What we mainly need in Eastern Europe is a change in the patterns of thinking and behaving.

And this is a historical challenge to adult education.

And I believe we can only live up to this historical challenge if we come to a really true and effective international cooperation.